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Stories of Innocence, Stories of Experience

The title above is of course an allusion to the great English poet William Blake and his two masterworks *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. As I think about the stories we've collected this issue of ASK, it seems right on the money to me to invoke these contrary states.

During our lives we lose our innocence and gain experience about the world on myriad occasions. What do we learn about ourselves from this? Uncomfortable as such occasions may be when they occur, reflective practitioners will see them later on for what they are: terrific opportunities to learn.

Experience may come by way of profound moments of change, or occur over long stretches of time by the steady accrual of small changes. A profound moment of change is what occurs in Ken Schwer's gripping story "Loss and Recovery," about a NASA mission that is lost only seconds after launch.

Several of the stories are by young project managers who've gained their experience when they stepped into positions of leadership. Tim Owen's story, "Less of Me," is in the same vein. So is "Boiling Point," by Michael Jansen, and "When My Name Suddenly Was 'Murphy'" by David Mitchell. Ken Schwer's story also shows that leaders learn much about themselves when confronted with adversity.

How would you lead people out of a devastating failure?

Then there is Terry Little's "Three Insights About Change." Here a senior project manager takes on a new job and relearns late in his career that change is valuable because it presents us with the opportunity to learn new things about ourselves. As Terry Little points out, change doesn't occur any less often as we get older, but a lifetime of dealing with change certainly provides us with precious insights of how to weather our changes better.

Essential to being a reflective practitioner is a willingness to test one's assumptions and change what one believes with new knowledge. We find this theme played out in all of the stories, but I find it especially intriguing in Julie Schonfeld's story "Is there a Perfect Organization?" After 12 years at NASA, she took a leave of absence to work at CISCO Systems in an attempt to restore some of the idealism she'd lost over the years at NASA. At CISCO she thought she would find the perfect organization. Did she? Read what she finds out and how it helped to get her to become excited again about working for NASA. This story appears in our "Special Feature: My Personal Quest." Is it too banal to say all



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Todd Post is the editor of ASK Magazine and works for EduTech Ltd. in Silver Spring, Maryland. He has written articles about ASK that have appeared in KM Review and Knowledge Management Magazine.

You can contact Todd at tpost@edutechltd.com and tell him what you think about this issue of ASK.

ASK Magazine

By practitioners for practitioners

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Stories of Innocence, Stories of Experience (cont'd)

projects are personal quests? Don't we learn something new about ourselves on every mission? With every team we work with?

Hope you feel you learn something from this issue. Whether that comes by way of a profound moment of realization in a story, or by a steady accrual of knowledge from reading all the stories, enjoy!

Todd Post